



The Bethel Courier.

Volume VI, Number 2

Summer, 1982

Bethel Historical Society



West Bethel Looking West, c. 1910

WEST BETHEL'S MAIN STREET

by Jane Hosterman

The following information on the buildings and their owners comes from many sources. The notes of Libbie Kneeland, who planned a history of West Bethel, but did not live to complete it, were invaluable. Maps of 1858 and 1880, and the census of 1911, helped. However, the information that West Bethel residents gave freely when talking about their houses for the Oxford County Historic Resource Survey really made this article possible. Particular credit goes to Arthur Gilbert, Olive Head, John Head, and Abigail Bean Fiske.

(#1) Starting on the east end of Main Street (now Gilead Road/Route 2), in the "Village" is the present Kendall Mill on the south side. It was built in 1867 by Alpheus S. Bean, one of the town's great benefactors. In 1901, after his death, it was sold to Merrill and N.R. Springer who came here from Dixfield. By 1911 it had become the property of the Rolfe Bros. Later it was sold to Stowell-McGregor. By the early 1930's it had ceased operations, its buildings in poor condition. Mr. Stowell sold the property to Paul Head, who shortly after World War II, conveyed it to Clayton and Morris Kendall. The mill was rebuilt and has been in operation ever since.

(#2) Across the street is the site of the West Bethel Railroad Station, built in 1865 several years after the railroad went through town, connecting Portland, Maine and Montreal, Quebec. When the Grand Trunk later instituted a policy to avoid station names which might prove confusing (Bethel, West, Bethel), the station was renamed Allen's, after the first station agent, John Fox Allen. At one time there was also a freight station and a siding. By the late nineteenth century, many local products were shipped by rail--potatoes, apples, grain, wool, wood products, etc. Passenger service was important for close distances, (Bethel, Berlin, Gorham, South Paris), as well as for Portland and Boston.

Northwest Bethel was also close, via the West Bethel Ferry. The decline of railroading is a well-known story. Railway mail and passenger service ceased in 1960 and the station was torn down in 1965.

(#3) Back on the south side of the street, moving westward, is the home of Dorothy Bean. It has an interesting history. The barn on the property was moved eastward and about 1929 half of it was moved forward to make the house. It was built for Gladys Johnson by Dana Morrill and Lee Mason. She had a store close to the road on land that now belongs to Kendall Dowell Mill. Louis and Florice Paul purchased that store in 1955. In 1967, they built their present L&F Country Store further east on Route 2. A.S. Bean owned the property in the 1880's. In 1891, *The Oxford County Democrat* recorded, "A.S. Bean is adding the second story to his store house to be used as a public hall." The hall was dedicated in July of the same year. Many activities went on here--dances, Sunday school, dancing classes, traveling shows, etc. School was held here for a brief period until a new school house was built in 1923. In 1903, after Bean's death, Edwin ("Ed") Bell purchased the hall. It was located just west of the present Bean house.

(#4) The vacant triangular lot across the street contained a dwelling in the 1880 Atlas, belonging to A.S. Bean, and to a Mrs. S.W. Potter in 1911. On the 1858 map a "Chapman and Bean Store" was located here. Gilbert Chapman was a West Bethel postmaster, appointed in 1854. The last family to live at this location was that of Lucian McAlister. The land now belongs to the West Bethel Union Chapel Aid Society, a gift in memory of Paul Head donated by his family.

(#5) Adjacent to this empty lot is the home of Marilyn Wheeler. Libbie Kneeland's notes indicate it may have been built by Leonard Grover. On the 1858 map, L.S. Whitney lived in this place. By 1880 it was owned by A.S. Bean. Mrs. Bell lived here in 1911 and Joseph Perry in 1959. Beside it at present is a small telephone company building.

(#6) Next is the home of Alanson and Tyrene Lovejoy. It began as a school house on "Old Route 2", near the homes of H.N. Head and Gilman Bean. It was "drug" by eighteen horses to its present location in 1878, and with some alterations became Pike's Store (#7). Mr. Pike was still operating here in 1911. In the 1920's Evander and Marian Whitman lived here and operated a store and lunchroom. By 1959, Fred Lovejoy was here, later his son Alfred, followed by Fred's grandson, Alanson.

(continued on page 2)

SUDBURY CANADA DAYS

AUGUST 14 - 15

MOSES MASON MUSEUM

(#7) E.J. (Ed) Pike purchased and lived in the house next to his store prior to 1880. In 1911 it was still listed in his name. Later owners were Martin Pike, Clarence Bennett, Clarence Rolfe (by 1959), Roland and Libbie Kneeland, and in 1980 it was purchased by Robert Buker.

(#8) Back on the south side of the street is the home of Roy and Mary Newton. This house was listed on the 1880 map as owned by A.S. Bean as well as his previously mentioned hall next door. By 1911, retired merchant W.W. Goodridge, his older children all grown and gone, lived here with his second wife, Estella Scribner and a daughter Libbie, (later Kneeland). The Goodridge family operated "Goodridge Cottage" for boarders for several years. By 1959, Burton Newton owned the property and was followed by his son, Roy. A barn on the east side is now gone and a front porch was removed in the later 1970's.

(#9) The lot next to Newton's once housed A.S. Bean's Hotel. Libbie Kneeland's notes record Bean purchasing it from Rev. S.J. Gould (a student minister at West Bethel's Baptist Church). It was used primarily to house his single workmen. In 1890, Bean had fifty-five men on the payroll working on logging teams and in the mill. About that time, West Bethel citizens were insensed by repeated bouts of drunkenness and Saturday night brawls by these "foreigners". They felt the temperance law was not being enforced. A local Lodge of the Good Templars was formed, convened in the Grange Hall, and grew to a membership of ninety in a few short months. In less than two years, however, the Lodge was dissolved for lack of interest. After A.S. Bean's death the building was purchased by Edwin Bell in 1903 who used it at one time for workers' housing. Many years later, since it had fallen into dilapidated condition, the building was razed.

(#10) About the same time A.S. Bean was building a community hall, he also started erecting the largest barn in Bethel. On the south side of the street, just west of his hotel, he had stone masons start the foundation in May, 1890. Over 250,000 board feet of lumber went into the structure. A tenement was included for the hostler and his family. It was finished by the fall except for interior work to be completed in the winter. This work was overseen by Edmund Merrill. In the late 1970's this elegant turn-of-the-century barn was razed--the silo, added later, is all that remains. West Bethel boasted an airstrip behind the barn at one time. The 1858 map locates a blacksmith shop in this general area. At present the land is owned by P.H. Chadbourne Co.

(#11) West of the old barn property is Mountain View Road built in 1976. Old maps show that Mrs. H. Farwell had a house here in 1858 and in 1880. E.B. Scribner lived in this location by 1911. He was the father of Stella Goodridge of "Goodridge Cottage" (#8) mentioned previously. The building burned about 1930 when occupied by Mrs. Almon Tyler. The Bethel Historical Society has a newspaper photograph, c. 1911 that shows the Hotel with its piazza, the Farwell/Tyler house, as well as Pike's Store (#6).

(#12) Across the street is the red home of Elizabeth Mason Carter. This vernacular house was built in 1867 and occupied by George Harden until about 1911. The side sunporch and garage have been added later. By 1914 Mona Martyn, Harden's granddaughter, had owned it and sold it to Hugh Thurston. Next Nahum Scribner, followed by his daughter, Mrs. Cora Scribner Brown, and then Pauline Dodge Mason, held title before its present owner.

(#13) Next to the Carter house is the site of the Pleasant Valley Grange Hall. The Grange was organized in 1875 and met in the school house, private homes, and Morrill Hall (#23) until 1890. In 1891 it could claim the deed to the Hall--all paid for--

and a surplus in the treasury. Albert W. Grover was in charge of construction and Amos Scribner did most of the carpentry work. In 1911, the rear shed was enlarged by twenty feet and in the fall of 1912 the new hall was dedicated. Some of the Grange records were destroyed by the fire in the Worthy Secretary's store (H.N. Head, #17) in 1919. As was the custom in most Grange buildings, Johnson-Haskell's Store was on the first floor on the building by 1899.

(#14) Returning to the south side of the road--again in the vicinity of Mountain View Road--the 1858 map records the residence of E.G. Davis. In 1880, J.S. Mason lived here. He had married the girl across the street, Robina, daughter of Jacob D. Grover, in 1855. There was no house here by 1911.

(#15) The Richard Walker house on the north side of the road is one of the oldest in West Bethel. Libbie Kneeland's notes record Jacob Grover as a tavern keeper here in 1832. The Maine Register of 1850 lists him likewise. The 1880 map reveals the main house (its end to the street) with a substantial two story ell at right angles (now gone), attached to a barn, another ell, and yet another barn. Earlier a shop existed in the area of the second barn. Mrs. Naomi Grover, Jacob's widow died in 1892. Various sources make it difficult after "the Grover era" to distinguish between tavern keepers and home owners. Names mentioned include, in 1904, Nellie Cribben. Later on this site, J.P. Swett, S. Westleigh, Lottie Wakefield (1920), Phillip Rolfe (1921), Allen Walker, and his son, Richard and wife, Mabel. Phillip Rolfe added the present full shed dormers on both sides of the main house in the 1930's. Richard Walker built the large enclosed porch across the front of the house in the early 1960's. This was once a two family structure.

(#16) Back to the south side of the street is the home of Wilbur and Davene Mitchell. They purchased it in 1981 from Clarence Rolfe. It was previously owned by his sister and brother-in-law, Carla and Herman Bennett. Earliest maps indicate a shop in this vicinity. By 1880, the house was on the map as owned by W.D. Mills (the blacksmith at #20). Libbie Kneeland's notes indicate it was built by Milton Holt (#17 and #21). Mills still lived here in 1911 and by that time had already survived three of his children. Mrs. Mills continued to reside here until about 1934. A son, Francis, the youngest, is still living in Maine.

(#17) Next door is a small garage owned by Arthur and David Head. The chronology of garages on the site starts about 1920 when Clarence ("Cad") Bennett bought and moved a tool shed from the Wild River Railroad, converting it into Bennett's Garage. This burned in 1933 and Bennett rebuilt. Subsequently it was owned by Carroll Abbott (a former Bethel Selectman), and was sold by his estate to the Head brothers. Originally on the site, however, was the Holt and Potter Store and Post Office (1858 Atlas). Photographs reveal it as an imposing two and one half story square building. Milton Holt was postmaster in 1857. Others who operated stores here were Henry Ward (#19), Milton Holt (#21) and Lyman Alger. By 1871, A.S. Bean was postmaster and owned this structure before 1880. By 1900, presumably from Bean's widow, Harlan Page Dennison moved here from South Paris and purchased the store and post office. In 1914, Robert Gilbert and Moses Davis ran this store. In 1915, Harry N. Head, with son, Paul, operated the business. On August 14, 1919, a lantern exploded and the entire structure, including a stable and ice house, burned. The H.N. Head store then moved next door.

(#18) The Mountain View Store was purchased from Wilbur and Davene Mitchell in 1981 by James and Patricia Pelzel. It previously was operated by owners Harry, and son Paul Head here

from 1919 until 1980. The building has a long history. An 1856 handwritten map belonging to Clare Mason Smith shows no building on the corner of Main Street and Flat Road. The official map just two years later locates "G. Chapman" here (perhaps Postmaster Gilbert Chapman). By 1880, John Needham lived in the house which had an attached barn, plus an outbuilding. Lapham's *History of Bethel* records that Needham was a West Bethel farmer and died in 1884. By 1901, A.J. Haskell who had operated the store in the Grange Hall, moved the house around the corner on the Flat Road, and laid a foundation for the present store. Apparently the barn was left in its original location. A butcher and hide shop was located in the new store. Haskell still owned the building when H. Dennison's (#17) daughter married a Whitten, and the Dennison-Whitten postcard factory began operation upstairs in 1910. It was short-lived, and the business, including all the help who lived in the hotel (#9), moved to Indiana a few years later. Joseph B. Haskell (son of A.J.) of Waterford, sold the building to Harry N. Head in August, 1919. There was once a grist mill in the barn of this property and old photographs show a windmill above the cupola. A tall false front on the store has also been removed. The post office was in Head's Store from 1926 to 1975. Paul Head was postmaster from 1926 to 1968, forty-two years, a Bethel record. Arthur Gilbert succeeded him here from 1968 until the new post office was built in 1975 (#20). Harry and Paul Head and later, Paul and Olive Head ran this store for a total of sixty-five years—longer than any other store in Bethel except for Bryant's Market on Bethel Hill. It supplied most of the community's needs—groceries, hardware, blacksmith supplies, window glass, hunting and fishing necessities, shoes, clothing and served as a deer tagging station. Many local children considered Paul Head a second father. It has been one of the most important commercial enterprises in the twentieth century in West Bethel. For many years the Head family lived over the store.

(continued on page 4)

THIRD ANNUAL FAYE TAYLOR MEMORIAL ART SHOW HELD MAY 29

The third annual Faye Taylor Memorial Art Show was held May 29 at the Moses Mason Museum. Each year the Show is held in memory of Faye Sanborn Taylor (1908-1972) who was a founder of the Society and a respected artist. Mrs. Taylor's son, Kent G. Taylor was present with four of his mother's paintings that have not been previously exhibited to open the show.

Six students were selected from a large number of entries from area schools and Gould Academy to become the 1982 prize winners. These students were Becky Witter (Grade 4), first prize; Sara Kailey (Grade 3), Second Prize and George Howard (Grade 1), Third Prize in the Grades One through Six Division. In the senior grade division Robin Gallagher, Gould Academy, won first prize with Todd Hartnett, Gould Academy, second prize and David Kersey, Grade Seven, third prize.

Mrs. Mary Isham of Albany was selected to receive the 1982 Faye Taylor Memorial Landscape Award of fifty dollars provided by the Bethel Savings Bank and a generous donor to the Bethel Historical Society.

Judges for the event were James B. Owen, Audrey Taylor and Alice Johnson.

The following day, the 193rd birthday of Dr. Moses Mason was observed with a party featuring old-time music, crafts, artists and traditional birthday cake and punch.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

It is traditional for the summer issue of the *Courier* to call attention to the Society's annual appeal for endowment funds. As most readers are aware the Society has been receiving over the past few years \$50,000 per year from the William Bingham II Trust for Charity in honor of Sidney W. Davidson who was instrumental in the restoration of the Moses Mason House Museum and placing the Society on a firm financial footing. This will be the final year of receiving endowment money from the Trust since the proposed level of \$250,000 will be reached.

Realizing that further endowment funds would be necessary if the Society was to continue to grow and prosper, the Trustees in 1975 began to appeal for donations to the fund which is now called "Regular Endowment" as distinguished from the Bingham Trust moneys known as "Sidney's Fund." The "Regular Endowment" has been enlarged with donations from friends of the Society through the years and with interest payments from prudent investment. It now totals nearly \$4000 and it has become possible to add one \$500 certificate of deposit each year. While this record is commendable, it is absolutely essential that more be done if the Society is to keep abreast of inflation and add the staff and facilities that are becoming increasingly urgent. I am proposing a goal of \$1000 per year be raised during the annual campaign.

By virtue of the generosity of the Bingham Trustees and by much hard work on the Society's part, we have assumed a leading role in the historical activities of western Maine. It will be through our efforts (both large and small) that the future of the Society and the Museum will be determined.

I urge everyone therefore to make some donation in any amount to the endowment fund. It is well to remember that all contributions are tax deductible and will be used only for endowment purposes.

Donald G. Bennett

IN MEMORIAM

Died, Ferol Godwin, June 9, 1982, sustaining member of the Society.

Died, Josephine Setze, New Haven, Connecticut, January 25, 1982, life member of the Society and cousin of Dr. Sidney W. Davidson. Miss Setze, a graduate of Smith College, studied in Italy and was long associated with the Yale Art Gallery where she was a recognized authority on American silver.

Died, Pearl Ashby Tibbetts, May 9, 1982, honorary member of the Society.

EDITOR'S CORNER

This issue will be the first that has appeared since the death of the Society's last Honorary Member, Pearl Ashby Tibbetts. Mrs. Tibbetts was an avid reader of the "Courier" and on a number of occasions composed a note conveying her enjoyment of a particular feature and adding a detail or two. I particularly enjoyed her supportive comments and shall miss her lively interest.

SRH

(#19) Across the street is the home of Gordon and Anne Mason. This is the third dwelling on this site. Originally Henry Ward lived here (1858). He was appointed postmaster in 1842. By 1880, Otis Needham, John's brother (#17) resided here. About the turn of the century the house was moved a short distance down the Flat Road, next to his brother's (John's) relocated house. Gordon's grandfather, Alden Mason built a new house on the old foundation. When it burned August 20, 1935, Gordon Mason and his mother were living there. They moved into A.S. Bean's Hall (#3) until the present house (similar in style to its predecessor) was finished in 1939.

(#20) Next is the West Bethel Post Office owned by Fumiko Head. It was built in 1975 by Walter Grover on land owned by the Heads. Mail facilities were moved from Head's store across the street. Arthur Gilbert continued as postmaster until his retirement a few months ago and Mrs. Caroline Merrill became Officer in Charge. In 1858 a shop was listed on this land and by 1880 W.D. Mills (he lived at #16) operated a blacksmith business here. The remains of this building were razed when the post office was built.

(#21) Across the street on the corner of Flat Road is a large dwelling recently sold to Allen Andrews by Wilbur and Davene Mitchell. In 1872, Alden Mason built it and Milton Holt bought it. He ran the Holt-Potter store (#17) and then operated from this new site for over twenty years. Old photographs in the Bethel Historical Society collection show this house/store with many changes. The conventional six over six dwelling type windows were replaced by large store front windows over a period of years. A porch was also added in front of these large windows, first on one side and then another. Milton Holt died in 1899, and due to his ill health, the store was closed for the last year of his life. His widow, Vienna, lived in the house until her death in 1914. Later Walfred Douglas, then Walter Bartlett, and finally Gerald Cushing and son, Douglas owned the building. It is locally called the "Doug Cushing Place," since he had a store here. Subsequently, it was purchased by Paul Heal in 1957 and operated as a restaurant by Jeanette Clough and Peggy Blake. Around this time it was occupied by Albert and Francis Bennett who lived upstairs. Later it remained vacant until sold to the Mitchells in 1980. It now contains three apartments. A carriage shed at the rear of the large barn collapsed years ago.

(#22) Olive Head's home, on the north side of the street, is next to the post office. It, and the two adjacent houses, were built by A.S. Bean in 1887 for his "bobcats"--the name he called his workmen. Whereas the Hotel (#9) was primarily living quarters for single men, this structure was designed to house two men and their families. Others who have been here are William Mason and Austin Jodrey. The Heads purchased it in 1944 and moved across the street (#18). The 1858 Atlas reveals a dwelling in this vicinity owned by A.J. Grover. It was not present on the 1880 Atlas.

(#23) The next house is owned by Rodney Kimball. It, too, was built in 1887 to house families of A.S. Bean workers. Large attached garages have been added to the back of the building in recent years, and presently a room is being constructed over the front porch. Previous owners include Edward Mason and Ralph Coulombe. The Kimballs purchased it in 1964. Morrill's Hall was on this same site, and owned by C. Morrill (#26). West Bethel's first free high school was held here from 1877 until it burned in 1880.

(#24) Next is the home of George and Harriet Stowell. Again it is similar to the previous two, built in 1887 and rented to A.S. Bean employees. Other owners have been Dana Morrill and Edward Casey. The Stowells moved here from Andover in 1953.

This spot also had an earlier building. David Holt was owner in 1858, and N.H. Merrow is located here on the 1880 Atlas.

(#25) Across the road is the West Bethel Union Church. The West Bethel Union Chapel Aid Society was formed, and officers elected in April, 1892. By 1894, they were legally organized. Their concern centered on the fact that there was no place, "adequate for religious purposes" in the village. The Free Will Baptist Church had ceased regular services in 1869. In 1895, A.S. Bean offered to build a church "with a tower, complete inside and outside, providing that the land, foundation, cellar, furnace, and furnishings, were obtained by the Chapel Aid Society." The offer was accepted, land bought from D.W. Allen, the church built, completed inside and dedicated October 16, 1897. A.S. Bean gave the deed to the church to the West Bethel Union Chapel Aid Society as he had stated in his original offer two years previously. Horse sheds on the west side of the property were disposed of in 1947. Townspeople had given generously of time, labor and money to build the foundation and furnish the church. A lawn party raised funds to purchase the original organ.

(#26) On the same side of the street, continuing westward, is the home of Ronald and Gloria Snyder. C. Morrill of Morrill's Hall (#23) lived here in 1858. By 1880 David Holt, who died in 1891, owned this house. In 1911, the Larys lived here. Others mentioned as owning this house are Mary Ordway, E. Hutchinson, Mary Richardson, Stanwood and Helen Moore and Michael Stowell. The Snyders bought it in 1966 and have done much to keep the structure in good condition.

(#27) The house of R.E. Mason shown in the 1880 Atlas, next door, is gone. On its foundation is a small dwelling owned by Stephen and Margaret Wight. This camplike building was moved to its present position from the Hutchinson's on the Flat Road in the early 1940's. It has been owned and used by various people--Gilman Hutchinson, Dwight Morrill, Franklin Burris (1959) and D. Fedner, among others. Shirley Gilbert had Gilbert's Trading Post, a gun shop, here in 1963. It was also used as a coffee shop at one time. It is now rented on a frequently changing basis.

(#28) Neil and Roberta Gilbert live next door. This house and the one just described, shared a lot and were commonly owned at one time. The land has now been divided. The house was built by Franklin Burris. D. Fadner was also an owner before the Gilberts.

(#29) West Bethel's first school house was on the north side of the road somewhere in this vicinity (prior to 1858). When a second one was built on the Flat Road in 1873 (Arthur and Ruth Gilbert's home at present), the original was moved. Charles Walder was responsible for getting it to the Flat Road home of John Murphy, and annexing it to the front of his house (Grace Hutchinson's home now). Perhaps the present trailer of Frances Bennett is located near the site of the old school.

(#30) Next to Frances Bennett's trailer is the home of her daughter and son-in-law, Andrew and Coleen Boyd. The Atlas of 1880 indicates this as owned by N.H. Merrow, a taxidermist. His daughter, Maud married Myled O'Riley who came from Canada to be station agent in 1891. She was a teacher in the Flat Road school. Many of the women in West Bethel today vividly remember their piano lessons with Maud O'Riley. The house stayed in the family until she died. The Boyds have done much work on the dwelling. The irreparable barn and carriage house were demolished, the back of the house re-built and the roof raised to a full two stories.

(#31) Diagonally across the street is the Pleasant River Campground. Built in the 1930's the property contains a small motel,



Pearl Ashby Tibbetts (r) and Consuelo Alger (l) (1961)

and several cabins, plus a vernacular bungalow house. Behind the buildings is a camping area on the Pleasant River. The enterprise was built and owned by Ralph Burris and now belongs to Rupert Jr. and Suzanne Grover of Fryeburg. The business is now being run by the Newells.

(#32) Proceeding west and crossing the Pleasant River (once called Brackett's Brook), the house of David and Debora Luxton is on the right. Others who have owned this old house and barn include Hazen Lowell (1911), and Darielle and Ronald Coulombe. However, the 1858 Atlas reveals the beginnings of a Goodnow (Goodenow, Goodenough) "family compound" in this area. Father Henry Goodnow built the house across the street on Fleming Road in 1838. (The town of Bethel accepted this road from Henry Goodnow's to the Pleasant River Bridge in 1854). His daughter married a Bean and Caroline Bean married George Goodenow. George lived in the present Luxton house in 1880 and was still there in 1910. Nathaniel Goodenow lived further up Fleming Road "under the mountain" by 1858 (this house is in Gilead). Nathaniel Goodenow and brother Cordelia apparently married daughters of Bazaleel Bean of Gilead. Patricia Pelzel who owned Henry Goodenow's house claims Henry and George (of the Luxton house) were brothers--(more likely father and son). Henry had a mental breakdown and was institutionalized. His wife (Maria Frost of Newry) made quilts and sold land to pay his bills. Eventually George was able to buy all the land back to keep it in the family. Sadly there are no Goodenows left in Bethel.

Some details about West Bethel are interesting. It was often called "Gander Corner". In his *History of Bethel*, William B. Lapham wrote that this developed "from the circumstance that two frolicsome blacksmiths stole a gander from a neighboring farm, roasted him over the forge-fire, and feasted upon him in the blacksmith shop." Another name of days past and still most appropriate to present conditions, was "Land of the High Winds".

In the early 1900's, the intersection of the Flat Road with Main Street (now Gilead Road), boasted a triangular grass plot complete with tree and gas street lamp. This village common has been gone for many years. However, due to increasing difficulty routing traffic appropriately through this intersection, the town of Bethel has just installed a small traffic island near the site of the old common. Perhaps we learn from the past.

PEARL ASHBY TIBBETTS (1884-1982)

My mother, Pearl Ashby Tibbetts died on May 9, 1982. She was an Honorary Member of the Bethel Historical Society, an honor of which she was proud. Her early association with the Society was as one of Eva Bean's friends and supporters. In addition, as an officer of the Bethel Library Association, Mother participated in the Library's fostering of the concept of a historical society, and she donated the chairs used for the early historical society meetings at the Library building.

My mother was deeply interested in the Historical Society and enjoyed contributing her personal memories of Bethel since her arrival here in 1912. In addition, she had many recollections of what Bethel people from the old native families had told her of early Bethel days. Her informants had been many, including Miss Annie Frye, Mrs. Anna French and Mrs. Alice Smith (our neighbors and descendants of the Twitchells), Miss Ann Maria Robertson, Mrs. John Philbrook, and Miss Mary G. Chapman. Mother's quick mind and excellent memory made her an apt pupil. She quickly passed such tests as correctly distinguishing among the William C., the William R. and the William L. Chapmans or sorting out the various branches of the Bean and Grover families. In listening to these reminiscences Mother had an unflinching ability to recognize the significant detail. I remember these ladies as very old — Miss Ann Maria Robertson (103) and Mrs. Philbrook (98) when they died — and I listened only vaguely, to my great regret now. How I would like an hour with Alice Smith today!

My mother had a warm and outgoing personality with a strong sense of humor. She always viewed institutions and history in terms of people. For her a school was always eager pupils and devoted teachers; a Church, in addition to being a place of worship, was the locus of good fellowship at church suppers or joy at the children's Christmas tree. Like Eva Bean she loved old jokes and old tales.

She liked to think of early Bethel also in human terms. The importance of the railroad was emphasized to her by the excitement recalled by Ann Maria Robertson on that great day in 1851 when the first train came in. From Miss Mary G. Chapman, granddaughter of Timothy Chapman, Mother heard tales about Daniel Gould and in the light of these stories she interpreted the early struggles of the Congregational Church.

More than fifty years ago I remember a talk Mother gave on the history of the Ladies Club of the Congregational Church. The Ladies Club was founded in 1815 with a long and useful tradition of service but with few really dramatic developments. Mother made it come alive for me, however, as she talked of the ladies exchanging recipes and visiting back and forth among the few homes then existing (including the Moses Mason house), connected by streets little wider than paths. For me she made these early Masons and Grovers and Chapmans and Hastings and Straws into real people. Her love of Bethel and its citizens was accompanied by insight and a splendid capacity to communicate. I think her contributions will be long remembered.

Margaret Joy Tibbetts

SOCIETY OFFICERS AND TRUSTEES

Donald G. Bennett, President; Alden Kennett, Vice President; Mary C. Keniston, Secretary; E. Louise Lincoln, Treasurer; Trustees: Edith Eaton Eddy, Lehen Morton, Catherine Newell, Ronald Snyder, Margaret Joy Tibbetts.

THE BETHEL INN: ITS ROOTS AND BRANCHES (1833-1982)

By Donald G. Bennett

The roots of The Bethel Inn clearly have three origins: Eleazer Twitchell's incentives to develop the Bethel Hill around the Common and Mill Brook; Dr. John Gehring's need for an inn to accommodate his practice; and thirdly, the fact that the location of an inn or hotel on the Common had proven to be an asset to the village businesses, its social activities and the aesthetic composition of the general setting on the Hill.

Bethel's heritage of an inn on the Common began with the first Bethel House built in 1833. Eleazer Twitchell had constructed mills on Mill Brook to induce more settlers into this area of the township: besides owning the "mill lot", Eleazer also owned the lot encompassing the Common and village area around it. To profit from his investment he needed to sell parcels of these lots. Among others, Edmund Merrill a builder from East Bethel bought a lot on the west side of the Common. In 1833, he designed and constructed the first Bethel House, which was then purchased by Jedediah Burbank, son-in-law of Lt. Jonathan Clark, also one of Bethel's earliest settlers. At this time the number of homes and stores around the Common was growing and Bethel House catered to the new community's growing social needs as well as accommodating travelers who were coming to and from the White Mountains.

Although the old Bethel House (located about where the Opera House/Carver's Store is today), burned in Bethel's great fire of 1865, it had established the fact that innkeeping on the Common was a profitable venture. Also, in 1851 the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad had reached Bethel, easing travel from Boston, New York and Portland into the mountains.

The second Bethel House, c. 1863, renamed the Prospect Hotel after 1904, started on Broad Street located opposite the Gideon Hastings (Alger) residence. Along with it, smaller boarding homes were operated by Bethel Hill residents and this continued right up to the 1950's. The Elms, also called The Chapman House, located behind Bethel House approximately where the Bethel Inn is now, was probably the best known of the boarding houses. Eventually it was joined to the Bethel House/Prospect Hotel by an ell.

A 1905 brochure records that the Prospect Hotel was leased and operated by Shafer and Green Company, 18 Tremont Street, Boston. It was open year-round and could accommodate about 200 guests; it was steam heated, had porcelain baths, an automobile garage, and a garden and farm of twenty-two acres situated on Paradise Hill where the hotel raised all the country produce for its tables.

On Saturday, July 22, 1911 at 4:00 p.m., a fire which started near one of the chimneys had burned beyond the point of stopping it when discovered. The fire fighters were successful, however, in saving the wing of the Prospect called The Elms. At that time, the hotel was owned by Mrs. Charles F. Ford of Worcester, Massachusetts, who declared that she had no intention of rebuilding the hotel. It had been leased and operated by the Frank R. Greene Company with Harry King as the manager, according to the *Citizen* account.

By August 10, one of Bethel's most prominent personalities, William Rogers Chapman (1855-1935), Director of the Maine Music Festival and New York's Rubenstein Club, and a descendant of the man who had suggested "Bethel" as the town's name, announced that he intended to build a magnificent new hotel

and that he had already purchased the Prospect Hotel property.

A special town meeting was held on August 19, 1911 so that Bethel voters could decide on an article to exempt the new hotel from property taxes for ten years. The article passed with the proviso that a hotel of not less than \$25,000 value be constructed. Dr. Gehring was present and argued in favor of the article.

(As a footnote, the next spring's regular town meeting contained an article in the warrant to reconsider the tax exemption passed the previous August. But, according to the *Citizen*, the mechanics of rewording an amendment proposed from the floor tripped up the process so that the motion was a self cancelling one and the earlier tax exemption stood.)

At this stage of development though, Dr. John George Gehring (1857-1932) probably already had other ideas about who should build the new hotel. Dr. Gehring had lived in Bethel approximately twenty years; his patients who had come for treatment of their nervous disorders and exhaustion were from the uppermost ranks of the professional and business world. Gehring's home and the special dormitory behind his home were inadequate to house all of his patients. He needed a hotel appropriate to the life-style of these men and he had five potential partners at hand who had come to Bethel as patients. During 1912, Gehring encouraged his patients/partners to incorporate and start construction of the Bethel Inn on the Prospect Hotel lot, which had been purchased from William Rogers Chapman.

On October 24, 1912, their act of incorporation was filed. Its name was "The Bethel Inn." Its purpose was to erect and operate buildings for a hotel and private club. There was \$100,000 in capital stock; \$100,000 in Common Stock; \$47,500 in paid up capital stock. Par value of a share was \$100. William Bingham 2nd, of Cleveland, Charles Hubbard and Robert Winsor of Boston each owned 100 shares. Horace Sears of Boston owned 90, Dr. Gehring owned 65, William Upson of Cleveland and Ellery Park, Bethel, 10 each. Park was the clerk of the corporation. Five hundred twenty-five shares of Common Stock remained in the Treasury. Gehring was president of the corporation.

In the architecture of the Bethel Inn one could see its real purpose subtly revealed; the Inn's front rooms over the lobby were arranged en suite for the comfort of Gehring's patients, while the back rooms were single rooms designed primarily for nurses and attendants. Also the new inn's golf course was only just started and in a novel way. Only a few holes had been roughed out by Gehring's patients during their work therapy sessions west of the doctor's house.

The Bethel Inn opened to the public on July 12, 1913. The *Oxford County Citizen* reported: "There was never anything quite like it in Bethel before." But as early as opening day, the inn corporation had in reality become a co-partnership of William Bingham and William Upson. During 1914, a number of property transfers to these partners were recorded as they purchased land around the inn, along Mill Brook and the area which is now the golf course.

In January, 1914, the school house lot in District 15 of Bethel was sold by Eben S. Kilborn to Bingham. The school house was used for years as a barn, then a garage and workshop before eventually becoming a guest cottage in the late 1940's called first "The Park," after Ellery Park, and then "The Pines."

In September, 1914, Mary C. Rowe sold the Broad Street home of David Hammons (Member of Congress 1847-1849) to Bingham and Upson. This house was a guest cottage called "The Elms" for a time in the 1920's before it finally became the Upson

residence. The barn on the premises was converted to a theatre by Gehring's patients and they presented plays there.

Also during this time the former Dr. John Grover (1783-1866) house on Mill Hill was purchased and named "The Willows." This house was probably built in the late 1850's for Dr. Grover's retirement. He was considered to be Bethel's most eminent physician of the nineteenth century. His father was one of the earliest settlers and Grover was for many years president of the Board of Trustees of Gould's (now Gould) Academy. He had, prior to moving into this home, lived in the house next to it further up Mill Hill, which later became "The Elms" and then part of the Prospect Hotel.

A third area of land purchased by Messrs. Bingham and Upson was on the Songo Pond shore where a log cabin lake house was built.

By 1920, the Bethel Inn had two guest cottages, the "Elms" and the "Willows" plus the main inn which in all could accommodate about 80 guests, as well as the Songo Pond log cabin which had boats and canoes with an excellent swimming beach nearby.

In November, 1923, after the death of Agnes Hastings Straw, Bingham and Upson purchased the former William O. Straw House on Broad Street, built c. 1860. (In the 1820's Broad Street had been called "Straw Street" because three young women whose maiden name was Straw had married O'Neil Robinson, Moses Mason and John Hastings; all lived next to one another on Broad Street.) This house, today known as "The Elms", was converted to a guest cottage appropriately called "The Straw House" until 1956. A characteristic sight on summer mornings was to see a uniformed bus boy, serving tray carefully balanced on his shoulder, stepping quickly across the Common from the main inn with breakfast for "Straw House" guests.

Until 1940, the Inn stayed open in the winter although only the main building was used. During the twenties a toboggan slide about one-third mile in length with an elevated take-off ramp was located behind the Inn facing Mill Brook. At the foot of the toboggan run, the Inn had an ice skating rink and wood trails were kept open for snowshoeing and skiing. The toboggan ramp was torn down in the 1930's when there were no guests although the Inn remained open.

In the winter of 1928-1929 several major improvements were made in and about the Inn. The dining room was greatly enlarged and directly over the dining room new suites with fire-

places were added. A new electric elevator was installed. A central heating plant was built away from the main house and the golf course was improved. Also, a new cottage was added by converting a barn behind the old school house for guest accommodations. The cottage had sixteen rooms, nine tiled baths, eight fireplaces and a lounging room. Harriette "Ma" Cilley was the Inn's manager at the time, so the new guest cottage was named "The Harriette" (now "The Oaks").

In 1930, Sam Blackwood came from the Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston to become The Bethel Inn's Manager. All through the 1930's the Inn remained open in the winter, but with few if any paying guests. However, the Inn was fully staffed, and as a consequence was losing about \$100,000 annually. Blackwood, who was an enthusiastic, well-liked innkeeper, suffered a heart attack which forced him to retire. After a succession of two less than satisfactory managers, Peter Schutt arrived from Christmas Cove to become the new manager in 1940. He remained the Inn's manager until 1956. Since Mr. Bingham had another summer place in Christmas Cove (near Boothbay Harbor), his inner circle of advisors had been able to inquire about the new manager before offering him the Bethel position. Schutt, however, had an inn to manage in Florida during the winter season. So from 1940 until 1961 the Inn closed for the winter. Bingham only approved this change in policy as long as all employees were to be paid a full year's salary unless they got other jobs. Closing in the winter cut the Inn's annual deficit down to about \$45,000.

The management of the Inn remained basically unchanged until Mr. Bingham's death on February 17, 1955. Among the many provisions in Mr. Bingham's will, two related directly to the Bethel Inn.

The third clause bequeathed to each full-time Bethel Inn employee \$100 for each year of employment whether the Inn was actually open year-round or not.

The eighth clause authorized his trustees their absolute discretion in either operating, improving or reconstructing the Inn whether or not the Inn yielded a profit; to discontinue its operation and wind up its affairs and to demolish in whole or in part any and all buildings used in connection therewith.

The trustees chose to find a suitable buyer. For the first time in the Inn's forty two years, ownership would be in the hands of someone other than William Bingham II.

(continued on page 8)

Join the Bethel Historical Society dedicated to preserving and interpreting the local past.

Membership in the Society entitles you to:

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) free admission to the museum | (5) quarterly newsletter |
| (2) special discounts at museum store | (6) reduced course fees |
| (3) preferred rate for meeting room rental | (7) voting rights in the Society |
| (4) special library and archival privileges | (8) special invitations to Society occasions |

(Please Print)

Name

Address

Signature

Please check appropriate category and send your remittance to: Box 12, Bethel, Maine 04217

-----Sustaining \$2.50 (Individual)

-----Contributing \$10.00

-----Patron \$25.00

-----Students (under 18 years) \$1.00

-----Life over 55 years \$50.00 single

-----Life over 55 years \$75.00 couple

-----Life under 55 years \$100.00 single

-----Life under 55 years \$150.00 couple

By June 27, 1955, a suitable prospect was found in Mr. Guy P. Butler, a career hotel operator and President of the Maine Publicity Bureau, who had formed a corporation with his wife called Bethel Inn, Inc. Ownership of the Bethel Inn was transferred but a twenty year reservation on selling the Inn was contained in the sale to Butler. Peter Schutt was talked into remaining as manager one more year.

Now the owner, Butler decided on an extensive renovation project for the winter of 1955-1956. To help finance this work he issued \$35,000 in preferred stock. Many guests' rooms had no private baths, rooms in the "Straw House" and "Willows" needed much reconditioning as well as "The Harriette." During that winter thirty new bathrooms were installed in the "Straw House" and "Willows." In the winter of 1959-60, "The Harriette" was given similar treatment, receiving eight new bathrooms which were installed without losing a great amount of guest living space by creating new single rooms with baths. The swimming pool by "The Oaks" was put in for the 1959 season; it paid off its \$100,000 cost the first year.

Although the Butlers did not intend to keep the Inn open in the winter, they needed a winter office as well as a place to live. In 1938, Mr. Bingham had purchased Fred Merrill's house. The seller's grandfather was Edmund Merrill, Sr. who had designed and built the old Bethel House in 1833. The house Mr. Bingham had purchased was built c. 1874 and is the only one on Broad Street with a mansard roof. The Merrill house was not included in the June, 1955 sale of the Inn, so the Butlers had to buy it separately which they did in December, 1955. Since then it has been considered part of the Inn's buildings.

After the first set of renovations were completed in 1956, the new owner renamed three cottages; "The Harriette" became "The Oaks"; "The Park" became "The Pines" and "The Straw House" became "The Elms". The owner's residence was named "The Maples."

Overall from 1955-56 until the fall of 1961, the Butlers had spent about \$135,000 in physical improvements, including improving the heat system and winterization.

During the winter of 1961-62, Bell Telephone Company was constructing the Telstar Satellite Communication Station in Andover so it contracted with the Bethel Inn for housing their engineers and supervisory crew. Also, the Sunday River Ski area would be in its third season so the Butlers decided to test the

Published quarterly by the Bethel Historical Society, Stanley R. Howe, Editor. Please address all inquiries and suggestions to Editor, Bethel Historical Society Newsletter, Box 12, Bethel, Maine 04217.

Inn's ability to attract skiers with the Bell contract backing them up. This would be the first winter that the Inn would be open since 1940.

The advertising outlay to attract ski business was \$6,000. Another \$10,000 was spent getting ready for winter business. That winter the Inn ran a full scale operation with the same meal schedule and staff that was used in the summer. At the end of the season the proceeds from winter guests (skiers) other than the Bell people was \$6,000, or the amount spent in advertising, so the Butlers decided against any future winter operations.

Instead of the Inn's past history of annual deficits, business grew each year so that all rooms were filled from July until Labor Day and the months of June and September were increasingly near full capacity due to convention and group business. However, Mrs. Butler's death in 1966 forced an unexpected change in Guy Butler's plans.

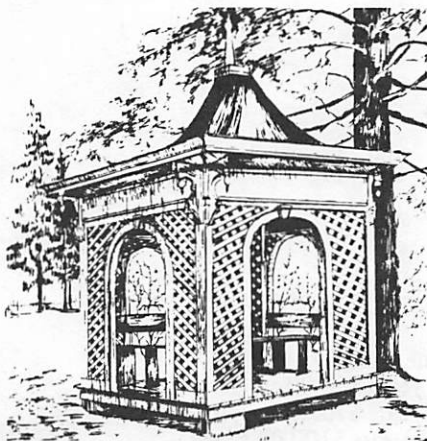
In December, 1966, the Bethel Inn was sold back to the Bingham Trustees who formed a subsidiary corporation called "Bethel Holding Co." to run the Inn. Guy Butler stayed on as Executive Director and Assistant Treasurer of the Company. Blaine Moores was hired in June, 1967, as resident manager until June, 1968, when he became general manager and Butler stepped aside entirely. This management scheme continued until about 1970.

Back under "Bingham group" management a strange thing happened. For some years Butler had sought to purchase more land from the Bingham estate in order to lengthen the golf course to a regulation size; however, he considered the asking price of \$10,000 too steep for the value of the project. At the first directors' meeting of the Bethel Holding Company the subject of a regulation course came up again because one director was a keen golfer. At that meeting the extra land was added to Bethel Inn property. Price? One dollar.

The Inn was sold to the Alliance Corporation in 1976 and later purchased by Bethel Commodore Corporation which operates it today.

The Bethel Historical Society
P.O. Box 12
Bethel, Maine 04217

U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 8
BETHEL, MAINE
04217



Summer House, Moses Mason Museum